You and Your HEALTH

A Woman's Handbook

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Ministry of Health Planning
Office of the Special Advisor,
Women's and Seniors' Health

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WELCOME

Welcome to the third edition of *You and Your Health: A Woman's Handbook*. Demand for the first two editions, distributed primarily through the Screening Mammography Program of BC and doctors' offices, exceeded 55,000 copies. Requests for the handbook have also poured in from all over North America, plus European countries such as France and Italy.

The success of the handbook is strong proof that as women, we recognize the special nature of our health care needs, which are significantly different from those of men. Because of differences in social and economic status, educational focus, pay rates, and the impact of violence in women's lives, our health exists in a different social context from men's health. There are many health issues that are particular to women and that require a special, women-centred approach.

We are living in a time when women want to know more about their bodies and how to take responsibility for their own health, as well as the health of their families. More than ever before, women are becoming informed health care consumers. Health care professionals are learning to respect women's need for information and their desire to be partners in their own health management.

This is the way of the future for health care and particularly for women's health care. Historically, women have been in the vanguard of the self-care movement, and we continue to point the way for others to follow. This is the spirit in which we offer *You and Your Health: A Woman's Handbook*. Used wisely, it can help you to become more confident about your ability to make informed lifestyle and health care choices.

Project Sponsors and Partners

This booklet is a project of the B.C. Ministry of Health Planning, Office of the Special Advisor, Women's and Seniors' Health (the Office) It is being distributed to women in B.C. through the courtesy of the Screening Mammography Program of B.C. and provincial health authorities.

This Office provides a link between the Ministry of Health, health care providers, and community groups in order to promote a health care system that is sensitive to the needs of women. The Office works to ensure that provincial-level health policies are gender sensitive and helps health authorities develop women-centred policies and services. The bureau also supports a limited number of projects such as research on women's health issues.

For more information about the Office of the Special Advisor, Women's and Seniors' Health, phone **(250) 952-2256** or visit the Office's Web site: **www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca/whb.**

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INTRODUCTION

Why this booklet?

Individual brochures and booklets on breast cancer, osteoporosis, and other women's health issues are available in a variety of places such as doctors' offices and health units. However, until now women in B.C. have not had easy access to a comprehensive general guide to staying healthy. This handbook will help fill that need. *You and Your Health* focuses on preventing, identifying and managing common women's health concerns and will be widely available in places where women seek preventive health services.

Why focus on women's health?

Paying special attention to women's health is important because gender is a determinant of health. Women not only have a different physical makeup from men, they have different life experiences, such as their roles as mothers and family caregivers. They are more likely to have low incomes and low social status and are more often adversely affected by other determinants of health such as the need for social support. Because of a woman's role as family caregiver, her health is important not only for her own sake but also for the sake of her family.

Most women in B.C. enjoy good health. However, women have more contact with the health system because they live longer than men, have more care-giving and child-rearing responsibilities, and have more chronic illnesses. Women are also subject to specific health problems such as breast cancer and cancers related to the reproductive system. Some problems, such as heart disease, stress, and sexually transmitted diseases, are associated with environmental and lifestyle factors. Women can do a great deal to protect their health by learning about positive lifestyle choices and about how to develop healthy living and working environments. Other risks, such as sexual assault and relationship violence, are associated with women's social roles

and personal relationships. For women, recognizing the dynamics of an unhealthy intimate relationship may be a matter of life and death.

Some aspects of women's health (menopause and reproduction, for example) may be over-medicalized, and women often want to know about non-medical approaches to these issues. On the other hand, some women's health concerns are minimized and discounted as emotional. Women need to know more about the possible reasons for their concerns and about gender-sensitive treatment. Sometimes, such as in women's cancers, early detection is the key to leading longer, healthier lives. In these cases, women need information about which tests are necessary and reliable.

This handbook helps to fill a need for reliable information about women's health. The information included here is based on scientific studies and well-established concepts, and qualified health professionals have checked it for accuracy.

How to use this book

This book is a tool to help you stay healthy. It shows you what you can do to develop the basic elements of a healthy lifestyle. It will help you to understand potential health risks and how you can offset those risks by being alert to your body and making positive choices. It will also help you to follow up on any potential problems with appropriate methods of early detection.

To make best use of this handbook, read it through and become familiar with the general concepts. Then go back to any sections you feel are important for you and study them more intensively. If you have a family history of heart disease or cancer, for example, you will probably want to become familiar with recommended preventive strategies. Everyone can benefit from a careful study of the opening section on guidelines for a healthy lifestyle.

Information contained in this book

This booklet contains information on a selection of women's health topics. The following are also sources of valuable health information for you and your family:

- BC HealthGuide Handbook offers useful advice and information on more than 190 common health concerns, as well as valuable tips on preventing illness or using home remedies. A new companion guide, the BC First Nations Health Handbook, is also available.

- BC HealthFiles are a series of fact sheets that provide information on common illnesses, plus other health and safety tips. Visit the Web site at www.bchealthguide.org

- BC HealthGuide OnLine links British Columbians with a world of up-to-date, reliable health information on more than 2,500 common health topics, tests, procedures and other resources. Visit the Web site at www.bchealthguide.org

- BC NurseLine provides health information and advice through a toll-free telephone line, staffed by registered nurses. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Translation services are also available in 130 languages.

Within Greater Vancouver: (604) 215-4700

Toll-free elsewhere within B.C.: 1-866-215-4700

Deaf and hearing-impaired toll-free throughout B.C.: 1-866-889-4700

For additional information on women's health resources, see Part 5: Getting Help, in this handbook.

PART 1:
STAYING HEALTHY

TEN TIPS FOR STAYING HEALTHY

1. Immunize.

Immunization is the best way to prevent serious diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B virus, and Hib, a type of bacteria that causes meningitis. Protect your family by keeping your immunizations and those of your children up to date.

2. Keep moving.

A minimum of 30 accumulated minutes of moderate exercise almost every day can improve your health significantly. Regular physical activity helps to maintain a healthy body weight and also helps control cholesterol and blood pressure. Moderate exercise will also help you enjoy life more. The best exercises to strengthen the heart and lungs are the aerobic ones like brisk walking, jogging, dancing, and swimming. Weight-bearing exercises such as walking, jogging, dancing, and tennis also build stronger bones.

KEEP FITT

Frequency: almost every day

Intensity: moderately hard within your heart rate range

Time: 30 to 60 accumulated minutes

Type: aerobic exercise (e.g., brisk walking, cycling, swimming,raking leaves, dancing, water aerobics)

BEGINNING AN EXERCISE ROUTINE

- Check with your doctor before starting a new, strenuous activity.
- Select activities you can:
  - achieve
  - maintain
  - enjoy
- Vary your exercises.
- Exercise with a friend.
- Adapt your exercise to your own physical capacities.
- Have fun.

3. Eat right.

A well-balanced diet of nutritious high-fibre, low-fat foods will give you energy and help prevent many health problems such as high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol.

Mom was right!

"Eat your veggies (and fruit). One of the best gifts we can give our immune system is to strive for five servings of fruits and vegetables each day."

Jeri Manley, RDN, Community Nutritionist, Vancouver Island Health Authority

GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHY EATING

1. Eat a variety of foods every day.
2. Emphasize fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
3. Choose lower-fat dairy products, leaner meats or meat alternatives, and foods prepared with little or no fat.
4. Limit salt, sugar, alcohol, caffeine, and processed foods.
5. Drink plenty of water.

For more information, see
Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.

4. Control stress.

Learning to relax can help you avoid the wear and tear on your immune system that comes with unrelieved stress. Simple relaxation exercises can slow heart rate and breathing, lower blood pressure, and help relieve muscle tension.

"Every movement counts — take the stairs, walk to work, play with your children, garden."

Patti-Jean Naylor, PhD, Physical Activity Consultant
B.C. Ministry of Health Planning

5. Be smoke-free.

The best approach is never to start smoking. If you do smoke, quitting brings tremendous health benefits. It is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and the health of those around you.

6. Avoid illicit drugs and excess alcohol.

Many medical problems are associated with the overuse or abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs.

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7. Put safety first.

To stay healthy, practice safety at home, at work, and at play. For example, two important practices that will help you stay healthy are safe driving and safe sex.

8. Allow time for healthy pleasures.

Enjoy the company of friends and family, take naps, play with your kids, laugh, care for a pet, get involved in your community, pursue your passion. Enjoyment can add to your health.

"Don't be afraid to get help if your feelings are interfering with your love, play or work life. The vast majority of people soon feel much better with treatment."

Dr. Shala Misri, Clinical Professor Psychiatry, UBC

9. Think positively about yourself and your options.

Your immune system responds to your thoughts, emotions, and actions. People with positive attitudes are often healthier. On the other hand, pessimism often aggravates ill health. See change as a challenge, an opportunity instead of a threat. Strong spiritual beliefs can also support your pursuit of healing and health.

10. Seek peaceful solutions to the conflicts in your life.

Look for constructive, non-violent ways to resolve conflicts at home, at school, at work, and in your community. Contact a health professional or your local women's centre for help if you are concerned about violent behaviour in yourself, a family member, or a friend.

FEELING GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF

Healthy feelings

Healthy feelings come from thinking positively about yourself and others. Evidence now supports the idea that what you think causes chemical changes in the brain that can influence your health and well-being.

Optimism and positive thoughts are resources for healing. Your body can create natural pain killers called endorphins, gamma-globulin for fortifying your immune system, and interferon for combatting infections, viruses, and even cancer. Your body can combine these and other substances into a vast number of natural prescriptions for what ails you.

With practice, you can learn to alter your feelings and improve your health by directing your thoughts into more positive channels.

Unhealthy feelings

It is normal to feel worried, anxious, and nervous from time to time, but these feelings are not normal when they become overwhelming and interfere with daily life.

Unhealthy feelings may include:

- Depression, with thoughts of hopelessness, helplessness, sleep and appetite disturbances, lack of joy, outbursts of anger or (in a small percentage of people) thoughts of harming either yourself or someone else
- Panic attacks (feelings of intense fear and anxiety accompanied by hyperventilation, shaking, pounding of the heart, and feeling faint)
- Phobias (irrational, involuntary fears of common places, objects, or situations)

- Obsessive thinking with compulsive rituals, such as checking or counting, which may interfere with your life
- Unrealistic thinking, which could include fears or perceptions not shared by others
- Thoughts of suicide
- Anger that leads to violent behaviour

Home treatment (relaxation, getting enough rest, keeping active and engaged, and so on) may help relieve simple anxiety and mild depression. However, if unhealthy feelings persist beyond two weeks, get help from a health care professional. There are a variety of ways to treat these feelings, including self-help, psychological and medical treatment. If you feel suicidal, this is an emergency. Get help immediately.

Health and relationships

Healthy relationships must include mutual respect, honesty, and trust. Unhealthy or abusive relationships may be hazardous to your emotional and physical health. Here are some clues to help you evaluate your relationship.

A healthy relationship:

- feeling able to talk about your feelings
- respecting each other's friends and activities
- considering each other's feelings and opinions
- feeling able to express differences of opinion
- having an equal say in negotiating solutions

An unhealthy relationship:

- believing you have more rights, or less rights, than the other person

- yelling when you are angry
- using the silent treatment
- getting what you want by pouting
- getting what you want by nagging

An abusive relationship:

- one person dominating and controlling the other
- not being allowed to see friends
- name-calling/put-downs
- intimidating or hitting
- constant criticism
- extreme jealousy or possessiveness
- not being allowed to have an opinion
- all property and bank accounts controlled by one person
- explosive temper; violence towards children, pets, or property
- needing permission to spend any money, join an activity or socialize with friends

If you are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, it is important to seek help. You can usually get help through organizations such as your local women's centre or shelter.

"Life is to be lived, not fretted about. Even when life is stressful, find a place of peace within yourself, and visit it every day."

Dr. Jennifer Mullet, Research Scholar, University of Victoria

MANAGING STRESS

What is stress?

Some stress is normal, especially when it is associated with crises and life-changing events such as illness, the death of a loved one, marriage or divorce, changing jobs or losing a job, or children leaving home. Some stress comes from the pressures we put on ourselves. As women, some of us tend to worry too much, overload our schedules, take on responsibilities for other people, and try too hard to please others. This kind of stress can build up to the point where we feel overwhelmed and defeated.

"Ask yourself: Am I showing myself the same degree of caring that I would to someone else I love?"

Elaine Stoll,
Registered Clinical Counsellor,
Westside Counselling,
Vancouver

How can you deal with stress?

Your attitude toward stress has a greater effect on your health than the stress itself. Taking a positive approach can help you regain a sense that you are in charge of your life.

1. Limit alcohol and other stimulants like caffeine and sugar.
2. Exercise regularly.
3. Practice relaxing for at least 20 minutes a day.
4. Get enough sleep.
5. Take stress breaks.
6. Do something for yourself every day.

7. Have realistic expectations of situations, of others, and of yourself.

8. Stop negative thoughts and look for the positive in situations and people.

9. Share your feelings with friends and family.

10. Keep your sense of humour.

If you feel your stress levels are too high and you have difficulty coping, you may want to look for someone who can help.

USING HEALTH CARE WISELY

Pay attention to your body.

- Be aware of what is normal for you.
- Keep a record of your personal medical history, including immunizations, screening tests (PAP smear, breast examination), menstrual cycle, surgeries, major illnesses, allergies, and current medications.
- Keep a record of major illnesses in your family.

Choose health care professionals carefully.

Choose a doctor or other health care practitioner before you need one. Ask friends, family, or other practitioners for recommendations. You may wish to interview practitioners to find one with whom you can work comfortably. Don't be afraid to ask questions about such matters as availability on weekends and holidays, house calls, what hospital a doctor works with, getting access to your personal records if necessary, and whether you can bring a partner, family member, or support person with you to your visits.

Be a partner with health care professionals.

Prepare for office visits by making a list of questions and symptoms — when they started and if or how they have changed. Voice your concerns and ask questions about anything you don't understand, including tests and treatment options. Make notes for future reference. If necessary, ask for copies of your personal health records. Inform yourself about your health and practice self-care.

Take part in deciding which treatment is best for you.

When you have a diagnosis, research your treatment options. You may find you have a number of choices that could be effective.

Make sure you understand the risks and benefits of prescription drugs.

When you are deciding whether or not to try a drug treatment, you need to consider whether the benefits will outweigh the possible harms for you. It is important to look closely at the information you read.

Marketers of pharmaceuticals and the patient groups they support often promote the most favorable interpretation of research results. For example, one study reported that a certain drug caused a 76 percent reduction in the incidence of breast cancer. But this number is misleading. Why? Because in reality only 1.0 percent of the women on placebo got breast cancer compared to 0.24 percent of women who took the drug. In absolute terms, this means that only three-quarters of one percent of women in the test sample benefited from the drug, not 76 percent of all women.

Absolute benefits of the drugs should be compared to absolute risks. In other words, out of 100 people who took the drug, how many people did the drug help? How many did it harm? You also have to know if the drug was tested on people like you, and if it wasn't, you can't be confident the drug would work for you.

Investigate complementary or alternative therapies.

Complementary therapies use a variety of non-medical approaches such as nutritional counselling, herbs and vitamins, massage, and other non-drug treatments. For women in midlife, especially, these methods may produce beneficial results and a feeling of being in charge of their own health. As with other therapies, it is important to make sure the treatment works for you and that it is safe.

"Women can make the best possible use of our health care system when we take an active role in our own care. Preparing questions, speaking up, taking notes... these are all ways we can help both ourselves and our health care providers to understand and respond to our needs."

Dr. Elizabeth Whynot, President, B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre

ADDICTIONS

You have an addiction when you have a physical or psychological "need" for drugs such as alcohol, prescription medications, or "street" drugs (for example, cocaine or marijuana). You may not know you have a problem until you try to stop using the drug.

- Avoid problems with alcohol by having no more than one or two drinks a day of beer, wine, or hard liquor, depending on your size and risk factors. If you are pregnant, abstain from alcohol completely.
- Don't use alcohol or drugs to deal with depression, anxiety, or loneliness. Try non-drug alternatives.
- Be cautious when using painkillers, tranquilizers, sedatives, and sleeping pills. Don't take more than your doctor recommends and don't take them any longer than is really necessary.
- If you think you may have a problem, get in touch with your health professional or a self-help group such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.
- Give yourself the following self-test to see if your drinking or drug use is serious enough to need outside help. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a problem that needs attention.

Self Test

- Have you ever had trouble or failed when you promised yourself to stop using alcohol or drugs for a week or more?
- Do you get upset when other people suggest you should stop or cut down on your use of alcohol or drugs?
- When faced with a problem, do you often turn to alcohol or drugs for relief?
- Do you ever feel guilty about your drinking or drug use and try to hide it?
- Have you had problems with family, friends, or co-workers because of your drinking or drug use?
- Have you missed any work days because of using alcohol or drugs?
- Do you ever go on binges with alcohol or drugs?

"Being healthy about the use of alcohol and other drugs is about not seeking unconsciousness and escape from feelings and pain but, instead, courageously opening to them and trusting in the healing power of your own truth."

Nancy Poole, research consultant on women and substance use issues

BONE HEALTH

Women usually reach their maximum bone mass in their thirties. After that, bones naturally start losing calcium and getting thinner. For most women this is not a problem. But some women lose calcium faster than others (for example, Caucasians, Orientals, smokers, those with a family history of osteoporosis). Osteoporosis is a name for the condition in which bones get so thin that they break easily.

Keep bones strong.

The best time to build strong bones is in your teen years, but most older women can slow the advance of osteoporosis through diet, exercise, and other healthy choices.

- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one or two a day.
- Put some physical activity in every day, especially weight-bearing activities such as walking, golfing, cross-country skiing, shuffleboard, curling, bowling, baseball, aerobics, dancing, racquet sports.
- Women 25 to 50 years need 1000 mg of calcium every day, plus 100 I.U. of Vitamin D. Women over 50 need 1,000 to 1,500 mg of calcium every day, plus 200 I.U. of Vitamin D. Foods rich in calcium include milk, cheese, and yogurt; canned sardines or salmon with bones; almonds; lentils or beans; tofu; and broccoli and other

"Most women don't realize that lattes are a good source of calcium because it takes only one tablespoon of milk to outweigh the effect of the caffeine. So you can buy a latte and feel good about it!"

Susan Barr, Professor of Nutrition, University of B.C.

vegetables from the cabbage family. If necessary, take calcium supplements. (For more information about non-dairy sources of calcium, phone Dial-A-Dietician at 1-800-667-3438.)

- Get some vitamin D every day to help your body absorb the calcium in your food. Sources of Vitamin D are sunshine and fortified milk.

Prevent fractures.

Strong bones help prevent fractures because thin bones break more easily; but the biggest cause of fractures is falling, even in women without osteoporosis. For women with osteoporosis, the most common fractures are in the wrists, ribs, vertebrae, and hips. Avoiding falls is the best way to prevent these and other fractures.

To prevent fractures and other injuries caused by falling:

- avoid overuse of tranquillizers and sleeping medications.
- wear proper footwear and use aids as appropriate.
- get rid of throw rugs.
- make sure your eyeglasses are the correct prescription.
- check that you are taking the right dose of blood pressure and other medications.
- develop a low-impact exercise program to improve your balance.
- learn to fall safely by using your arm to break the fall.
- advocate for better lighting and better-maintained sidewalks in your community.
- Consider wearing hip pads.

CANCER

Know the facts.

- The most common cancer in women is breast cancer, followed by cancer of the lung, intestines and rectum, and uterus, in that order. However, lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer death in women in B.C. These cancers (with the exception of lung cancer) are likely to respond well to treatment if they are discovered early.
- Women discover 90 percent of breast lumps themselves.
- The majority of breast lumps are not cancerous.
- The risk of breast cancer increases with age.
- It is normal for one breast to be slightly different from the other.
- The combination of monthly self-exams, professional breast exams, and mammography can detect breast cancer early, when a cure is most likely.
- Women who have more than one first-degree relative (mother, sister, daughter) with breast cancer before menopause have a higher risk.
- Beginning menstruation early and having menopause late are associated with a slightly increased risk of breast cancer.

"Breast self exams and having mammography regularly are simple, proven ways for women to live longer, healthier lives."

Wendy Norman, Medical Director, CARE Program, B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre

Know the signs.

- Report any breast lumps or any changes in appearance to your doctor.
- Report any of the following symptoms to your doctor: bleeding from the rectum, a change in bowel habits (persistent constipation or diarrhea), or vague, dull, or annoying abdominal pains.
- A chronic cough that may cause blood in the sputum is often the first sign of lung cancer. Other signs can include increasing amounts of mucus and shortness of breath.
- A PAP test can detect changes in the cells of the cervix before they become cancerous.
- Unusual bleeding before, during, or after menopause may indicate uterine or endometrial cancer.
- Squamous cell skin cancer can show up as a pale, wax-like, pearly nodule that may get larger and form a crust or as a red, scaly patch with sharp outline.
- Melanoma often begins as a mole-like growth which may become itchy or bleed. It may change shape, grow larger, or change colour. See your doctor immediately.

Protect yourself.

- You may be able to lower your risk of cancer by living a healthy lifestyle, including exercising and eating a low-fat, high-fibre diet that includes plenty of fruits and fresh vegetables.
- Examine your own breasts every month; have periodic professional breast exams; and if you are between 50 and 79, have a mammogram every two years.
- A condom or diaphragm can reduce the risk of cervical cancer (condoms can also help prevent AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases).
- Have regular PAP smears to test for cervical cancer. (See page 41 for more information on PAP smears and when to get them.)
- Don't smoke.
- Limit salt, alcohol, and caffeine.
- Maintain a healthy weight (see BMI chart on page 40) and do some physical activities most days.
- Be aware of changes in your normal state of health. If you have a lump or sore that does not heal or if something feels wrong, don't shrug it off. Have your doctor check it out.

"A PAP smear is the only screening test that will actually prevent a kind of cancer that is a common killer of young women. For the few minutes it takes, it just makes sense to get one regularly."

Wendy Norman, Medical Director, CARE Program, B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre

ENDOMETRIOSIS

Know the facts.

Endometriosis is a condition in which endometrial tissue (tissue from inside the uterus) attaches itself to other organs such as the outside of the uterus, the ovaries, the inside of the fallopian tubes, or the bowel.

Under normal conditions, endometrial tissue thickens with blood during menstruation, and the blood flows out through the vagina. But when the same tissue is outside the uterus, the blood flows into the pelvic cavity instead. This causes pain and irritation and may lead to the formation of cysts and scar tissue.

We do not know why some women develop endometriosis, but there is an as yet unproven concern about exposure to dioxins, PCBs, and other chemicals. There is a family history in seven percent of cases.

Recognize the symptoms.

- Pain before and during periods
- Pain during or after sexual activity
- Heavy or irregular bleeding
- Diarrhea or constipation and painful bowel movements with periods
- Lower back pain with periods
- Fatigue
- Infertility

If you have some of these symptoms and an abnormal pelvic exam, your doctor may order a laparoscopy to find out definitely whether or not you have endometriosis. A laparoscapy is a minor surgical procedure in which the surgeon examines the abdominal or pelvic cavity by inserting a laparoscope (a tube with a light in it) through a tiny incision in the abdominal wall (usually the navel).

Understand the treatment options.

Painkillers can help relieve the pain of endometriosis. In the early stages, when there is no major scarring, removing the endometrial tissue with laparoscopic surgery relieves the symptoms and eradicates the disease in 75 percent of cases. For women who don't want surgery, treatment with progesterone or oral contraceptives can often control the symptoms.

In some of the advanced stages of endometriosis, treatment involves hysterectomy and removing the ovaries. If all the endometrial tissue is carefully removed, additional surgery is usually not necessary.

Reduce the risk of developing symptoms.

Many women have endometriosis, and it disappears or is without symptoms. In many cases, using oral contraceptives with progesterone can help prevent the onset of symptoms.

Women with endometriosis should choose a healthy lifestyle, including frequent exercise and a diet rich in antioxidants.

To reduce the risk of developing endometriosis and associated infertility, do not delay childbearing to the late thirties, if at all possible. Women with endometriosis might not encounter fertility difficulties until later years, when infertility may also be associated with the aging of the ovaries.

HEART HEALTH

Did you know that heart attacks and strokes are the leading cause of death for women in Canada? Although 81 percent of women surveyed believe breast cancer is their biggest threat, in reality, more women die from heart disease than from breast cancer, uterine cancer, and lung cancer combined.

Fortunately, there are a lot of things you can do to prevent heart disease. Here are some ways to be "heart smart."

Avoid the risk factors.

Smoking

Cigarette smoking puts added strain on the heart because it constricts blood vessels. Women who smoke are two to six times more likely to have a heart attack than women who don't smoke. *Lifestyle prescription: don't smoke.*

High blood pressure

High blood pressure increases the risk of heart attacks and stroke. Women are more likely to develop high blood pressure after their middle years. *Lifestyle prescription: maintain a healthy blood pressure.*

High blood cholesterol

Between the ages of 45 and 55, women's cholesterol levels begin to rise higher than men's. About one in three Canadian women have cholesterol levels high enough to pose a risk for heart disease. *Lifestyle prescription: maintain normal cholesterol levels.*

"Just switching to 1% milk is an easy way to cut the fat in your food."

Jeri Manley, RDN, Community Nutritionist, Vancouver Island Health Authority

Lack of physical exercise

Inactive people are twice as likely to develop heart disease as active people. Regular physical activity also helps to maintain a healthy body weight and control cholesterol and blood pressure. The best exercises to strengthen the heart and lungs are the aerobic ones like brisk walking, jogging, dancing, and swimming. *Lifestyle prescription: do some moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes most days.*

Diabetes, or high blood sugar

Women with diabetes have double the risk of dying from heart disease. Women over 45 are twice as likely to develop diabetes as men. *Lifestyle prescription: use exercise and healthy eating to help manage blood sugar problems.*

Obesity

There is a clear link between heart disease and obesity (too much body fat). Maintaining a healthy weight helps prevent heart disease by reducing the risk of high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol levels. (Use the Body Mass Index or BMI chart on page 40 to find out your healthy weight.) *Lifestyle prescription: maintain a healthy weight by increasing your physical activity and eating a balanced, low-fat diet.* (See below for a definition of a healthy diet.)

Six Steps to Heart Healthy Eating

1. Eat less added fats.
2. Eat more whole grain products.
3. Eat more vegetables and fruit.
4. Choose lower-fat milk products.
5. Select smaller, leaner portions of meat and meat alternatives.
6. Limit high-fat snacks and desserts.

High stress levels

Stress may be a factor in heart disease. *Lifestyle prescription: control stress through deep breathing, yoga, and other methods of relaxation.*

Low blood levels of B vitamins

The vitamins folic acid, B6, and B12 may be important for a healthy heart and blood vessels. Some studies show that people with low levels of these vitamins have high levels of the amino acid, homocysteine, and that including these vitamins in your diet or taking them in the form of supplements can lower homocysteine levels. Although it has not yet been proven, high levels of homocysteine may increase the risk of hardening of the arteries, which can cause heart attacks or strokes. Women should be sure to meet the Recommended Daily Allowances for these vitamins: 400 micrograms per day of folic acid, 1.3 to 1.5 mg per day of Vitamin B6, and 2.4 micrograms per day of Vitamin B12. *Lifestyle prescription: consume adequate amounts of folic acid, Vitamin B6 and Vitamin B12.*

Learn the warning signs.

Women often experience different heart attack symptoms than men do. These differences can result in a wrong diagnosis and may delay your chances of getting the right treatment. Knowing the warning signs may save your life.

Heart attack: signs and symptoms

- Vague discomfort in the chest that doesn't go away
- Sudden, severe crushing chest pain that may move to other parts of the body
- Heaviness, pressure, squeezing, fullness, burning, or other discomfort in the chest, shoulder, arms, neck, or jaw that doesn't go away

- Unusual pain that spreads down one or both arms
- Nausea or indigestion that won't go away, or repeated vomiting
- Shortness of breath, paleness, sweating, or weakness
- Feelings of extreme anxiety, denial, or fear

Stroke: signs and symptoms

- Sudden weakness, numbness, and/or tingling of the face, arm, or leg (may last only a few seconds)
- Sudden trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Dimness or loss of vision, particularly in one eye, or double vision
- Sudden or severe unusual headache
- Unexplained dizziness or lightheadedness, unsteadiness, fainting, or a sudden fall

"I was surprised to learn that the risk of heart disease is greater for women than the risk of cancer."

Vancouver Island woman

MENOPAUSE

Menopause usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55, when a woman stops ovulating. Menopause is a natural process that marks the end of a woman's ability to bear children.

Know the facts.

- In menopause, periods gradually become irregular as ovaries stop producing estrogen.
- You have reached full menopause when your periods have stopped altogether for 12 months (or two years if you are under 50).
- It is still possible to get pregnant during the transition period (within a year or two after periods stop).
- After menopause, you are at greater risk for heart disease and thinning bones.

Know the signs.

You *may* experience any one or more of these signs:

- Irregular periods
- Hot flashes/flushes (suddenly feeling hot)
- Night sweats
- Weight gain
- Mood changes (anxiety, lethargy, irritability, depression)
- Changes in sex drive
- Itchiness and dryness of the vagina
- Difficulty sleeping
- Frequent urination
- Skin changes
- Forgetfulness

Take care of yourself.

- Become informed. If symptoms bother you too much, you can choose among a variety of therapies, including diet, exercise, vitamins, and herbs, as well as hormone therapy or other medical approaches. Check with B.C. Women's Hospital for more information on non-medical approaches (see *Women's Health in Midlife Kit* in the Resources section on page 49), and work with your health care professional to find the right solution that carries the least risk for you.
- Keep a record of your periods and any other symptoms, both physical and emotional. Report any irregular bleeding to your health professional.
- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet and get some exercise most days.
- Keep your stress level down. See page 10 for some ideas.
- For hot flushes, dress in loose clothing, have cold drinks, carry a hand fan, and take cool showers. Keep your home and workplace cool, and avoid alcohol, caffeine, and hot spicy food.
- Use a water soluble lubricant such as K-Y Jelly (not Vaseline) for vaginal dryness during sexual intercourse.

"Often I wake up in the early hours of the morning and I can't get back to sleep. It used to really frustrate me but now I use the time to do my stuff. I play old songs quietly so as not to wake the family. I do the ironing, water the plants, write letters. I love this time. I also feel a sense of kinship with other women because I know that all over the country women my age are awake too! And, maybe, doing the same things."

Pauline Buck, a midlife woman in Vancouver

PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME (PMS)

PMS is a term for the wide range of physical and emotional symptoms that often show up a week or ten days before the menstrual period begins. The cause of PMS is unknown, but it appears to be a natural hormonal condition that causes discomfort but no lasting harm. PMS symptoms may include headaches, backaches, weight gain, fatigue, mood swings, tender breasts, bloating and water retention, increased appetite, diarrhea or constipation, clumsiness, confusion, crying, irritability, and several others.

Learn to manage your symptoms.

- Start by keeping a monthly record of your menstrual period, your symptoms, when they start, and when they end. After a few months, you'll be able to tell whether or not you have PMS and how it affects you.
- Eat small balanced meals four or five times a day. Eliminate caffeine, alcohol, and sugar, and limit salt (to reduce water retention and bloating).
- Get moving. Physical exercise helps relieve PMS.
- Taking 50 mg of vitamin B6 twice a day may help. (Never take more than 500 mg a day.)
- Learn to reduce stress and anxiety with deep breathing, yoga, and other relaxation techniques.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

STDs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, genital warts, and HIV/AIDS. Most women who have a sexually transmitted disease don't notice any symptoms, but if left untreated some STDs can cause pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

Protect yourself.

- Don't have unprotected sex (vaginal, anal, or oral). ALWAYS use condoms to prevent STDs, including HIV/AIDS.
- Don't share needles.
- If you have had unprotected sex, request a screening test for STDs when you have your PAP test.

URINARY INCONTINENCE

Women are more likely than men to have difficulty with incontinence, in part because of the effects of childbirth and hormonal changes during menopause. Women can experience urinary incontinence at any age, but it is more likely to affect women over 45. There are different types of incontinence, some of which may require medical treatment, but in some cases you can control it with a combination of self-care approaches.

Diet

Try avoiding foods and drinks that may irritate the bladder. Possibilities include alcohol, tea, coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, tomatoes, spicy foods, and fruits high in acid.

Behaviour

Train your bladder to hold more urine. Avoid urinating every time you feel a mild urge, and set up a schedule for urinating and try to stick to it. To empty your bladder more completely, lean forward while urinating.

Exercises

Strengthening the pelvic muscles can make it easier to control the flow of urine. To exercise the pelvic muscles, squeeze them for a count of ten. Repeat 12 to 20 times and do three sets a day.

VIOLENCE

The most common forms of violence against women are battering and sexual assault. Most acts of violence against women are committed by people we know rather than by strangers.

Battering often begins with verbal threats or abuse or relatively minor incidents. But these incidents can become more serious and may cause physical harm.

- If you are in a marriage, a relationship, or a family that includes violent behaviour or inappropriate sexual behaviour, don't keep it to yourself. Tell a friend, a member of the clergy, or a health professional.
- Know where to go for help. Your local crisis help line, health unit or public health office, women's centre or transition house, police department, or hospital will have information on shelters and safe homes. Look in the Yellow Pages for hot lines and other resources you might need.
- Watch for warning signs such as threats or drunkenness so that you can avoid danger or seek protection.
- Have an "exit plan" ready to use in an emergency.

"When it comes to violence in women's lives, we need to take ourselves more seriously. Often we minimize the danger we are in or are so concerned about everyone else that we don't want to cause a fuss and therefore don't reach out for the help we need and deserve."

Tracy Porteous, B.C. Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs

PART 3:
PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

To stay on top of your health, consider having all the recommended immunizations and screening tests. Immunization alerts your immune system to a disease so your body can quickly wipe it out before it takes hold. Screening tests warn you that something may be wrong early enough to get treatment before it becomes serious.

IMMUNIZATIONS

Most people have immunizations for pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps, and rubella (German measles) as children.

Diphtheria and Tetanus

Tetanus (also known as lockjaw) can be very serious. Thanks to immunization, diphtheria has almost disappeared in Canada. To ensure continuous protection, you need a booster for these every 10 years. If it has been at least five years since your last Td (tetanus and diphtheria) shot and you have a wound that may be contaminated, ask if you need a Td booster.

Rubella

If you are of child-bearing age and you do not have records showing that you were vaccinated for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), talk to your doctor about whether or not you should get a shot. Rubella can cause congenital defects in a developing fetus.

Influenza

If you are 65 or over or have a chronic health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease, you should have an influenza vaccination every year in the autumn.

Pneumococcal vaccine

If you are 65 or over, you need a one-time pneumococcal vaccine to prevent a serious form of pneumonia.

Hepatitis B

If you may be exposed to infected blood (for example, health care providers, IV drug users, and people with multiple sexual partners), you need a hepatitis B vaccination.

Others

You may need other vaccinations if you plan to travel in areas where diseases such as hepatitis, typhoid, and yellow fever are common.

SCREENING TESTS

Blood Cholesterol

Having some cholesterol (fat) in your blood is normal, but having too much of a certain kind of fat known as LDL (low-density lipoprotein, or "bad" cholesterol) increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. However, high levels of HDL (high-density lipoprotein, or "good" cholesterol) can help protect against heart disease.

If you are over 55 or have a family history of high blood cholesterol or heart disease (before age 55 in your father or brother or before age 65 in your mother or sister), you may need a test to establish your blood cholesterol level. Other reasons for testing blood cholesterol are high blood pressure, smoking, too much abdominal body fat, diabetes, and eating a high-fat diet.

Your total cholesterol level should be below 5.2 mmol/l, and your HDL should be above 1.1 mmol/l. Anything between 5.2 to 6.2 total cholesterol is borderline high risk. Above 6.2 is high risk.

See pages 27-30 for tips on keeping your blood cholesterol at a healthy level.

Blood Pressure

To protect yourself against strokes and heart attacks, have your blood pressure tested whenever you visit your doctor or every two to three years, whichever comes first. If you are on the birth control pill or if you are over 65, have a blood pressure test once a year.

Normal blood pressure is around 120/80. The numbers refer to the pressure that builds up in your blood vessels when your heart contracts (the first number) and relaxes (the second number). Anything over 140/90 is considered high enough to need attention. Blood pressure can go up and down for a number of reasons, however, so you may want to check it a few times to determine whether or not you have a problem.
See pages 27-30 for tips on keeping your blood pressure at a healthy level.

Blood Sugar

New Canadian guidelines suggest that women over 45 should have a blood-sugar test every three years to detect late-onset diabetes. You may need the test more often if you have one or more of the major risk factors:

- obesity
- family history of diabetes
- mother of a nine-pound or heavier newborn
- history of pancreatic disease
- member of a high-risk ethnic group (Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian, African)
- diagnosed with coronary heart disease
- previous indications of high blood sugar or glucose intolerance

Breast Health

When breast cancer is discovered early, treatment is more likely to be successful. There are three ways to detect breast lumps that may be cancerous:

1. examine your own breasts every month, and
2. have your health care professional examine your breasts once a year, and
3. have a mammogram every two years between the ages

"Peace of mind is worth the small time it takes for simple screening procedures that can detect cancer early, when treatment is more effective."

Sheila King, Screening Mammography Program of B.C.

of 50 and 79. The benefit of mammograms for women under 50 is still unclear, but you may want to begin mammograms at age 40 if you have a mother or sister who had breast cancer before menopause.

If you are not sure how to give yourself a breast exam, ask for help from your health care professional or contact your local Cancer Society office. See the section on "Getting Help" for more information and resources.

Healthy Weight

Avoiding excess body fat helps protect against several health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, gall bladder disease, osteoarthritis, gout, and cancer. The best way to keep a check on your weight is with the Body Mass Index (BMI). The BMI is the ratio of height to weight. A BMI of 20 to 25 is good for most people. For example, a healthy weight for a woman 170 cm (5 ft. 8 in.) tall would be anywhere between 54.4 kg (124 lb.) and 71 kg (156 lb.).

"Most women obsess too much about eating. Eating should be an enjoyable experience."

Susan Barr, Professor of Nutrition, University of B.C.

Use the BMI chart on the next page to find out if you are overweight, underweight, or a healthy weight. If you are overweight, see pages 3-5 for tips on healthy eating and exercise.

Body Mass Index

Instead of using the standard height-weight charts, most diet experts look to the Body Mass Index (BMI) as a healthier measure. The BMI relates to excess body fat, rather than simple overweight. In the table (below) find your height in the left-hand column, then move across the row until you find your approximate weight. The number in bold at the top is your BMI. For most women the target is 21 to 23; for men, 22 to 24.

	19	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	**35**	**40**
Height (inches)	Body Weight (pounds)													
58"	91	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	133	138	143	167	191
59"	94	99	104	109	114	119	124	128	133	138	113	148	173	198
60"	91	102	101	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	179	204
61"	100	106	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	118	153	158	185	211
62"	104	109	115	120	126	131	136	142	147	153	158	164	191	218
63"	107	113	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	197	225
64"	110	116	122	128	134	140	145	151	157	163	169	174	214	232
65"	114	120	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	210	240
66"	118	124	130	136	142	148	155	161	167	173	179	186	216	240
67"	121	127	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	223	255
68"	125	131	138	144	151	158	164	111	177	181	190	197	230	262
69"	128	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	236	270
70"	132	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	207	243	278
71"	136	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	250	286
72"	140	147	151	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	258	294
73"	144	151	159	166	174	112	189	197	204	212	219	227	265	302
74"	118	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	272	311
75"	152	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	279	319

Adapted from D.A. Bray and D.S. Gray. Source: National Institutes of Health.
1996 Family Circle, Weight Loss Secrets.

PAP Test

If you are sexually active, you should have regular PAP tests to detect any changes in the cells of the cervix that could eventually become cancerous. Discuss the frequency of testing with your doctor because the recommended frequency depends on your risk factor and the results of previous PAP tests.

Pelvic Exam

A pelvic exam performed by a health care professional can help detect abnormalities in your reproductive organs, such as ovarian or uterine tumours. A pelvic exam consists of an external examination of your genitals, a PAP test, and a manual exam of your uterus and ovaries.

STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)

If you have been sexually active with two or more partners in the previous year, you should request swab tests for chlamydia and gonorrhea. There are also blood tests for syphilis, hepatitis B, and HIV. Chlamydia and gonorrhea can be treated with antibiotics.

Part 4:
ASSESSING YOUR HEALTH

PERSONAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

	Yes	No
Don't smoke.		
Do 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days.		
Eat a balance of fruits, vegetables (including green leafy), whole grains, lower-fat dairy products and leaner meats or alternatives.		
Practice daily stretches or another method of relaxation for 20 minutes.		
Build positive social supports.		
Have no more than two alcoholic drinks a day.		
Don't take illicit drugs.		
Blood pressure is approximately 120/80.		
Blood cholesterol is less than 6.2 mmol/l.		
PAP tests are consistently clear.		
Do monthly breast self-exams.		
Get adequate calcium (1,000 to 1,500 mg per day, equivalent to two or three 8 oz. glasses of milk), plus Vitamin D (100 I.U. per day, or 200 I.U. if you are over 50).		

Part 5:
GETTING HELP

LIST OF SERVICES/CONTACTS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Office of the Special Advisor,
Women's and Seniors' Health
BC Ministry of Health Planning
5-2, 1515 Blanshard Street
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3C8
(250) 952-2256
Website:
www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca/whb

Toll-free Ministry of Health Services
Information Line
Victoria: (250) 952-1742
Toll-free: 1-800-465-4911

YWCA Information Centre
(604) 895-5790

Medical Services Plan
Victoria: (250) 386-7171
Vancouver (604) 683-7151
Toll-free: 1-800-663-7100

BC Women's Hospital and Health
Centre
4500 Oak Street
Vancouver, B.C., V6H 3N1
(604) 875-3060

BC HealthGuide Program

BC OnLine
www.bchealthguide.org

BC NurseLine
Within Greater Vancouver
(604) 215-4700
Toll-free elsewhere in B.C.
1-866-215-4700
Deaf and hearing-impaired toll-free
throughtout B.C.
1-866-889-4700
Translation service available upon
request.

INFORMATION ON SPECIFIC TOPICS

Addictions

Alcohol and Drug Information and
Referral
Toll-free: 1-800-663-1441
Lower Mainland: (604) 660-9382

Aurora Centre
4500 Oak Street
Vancouver, B.C., V6H 3N1
(604) 875-3060

Problem Gambling
1-888-795-6111

AIDS

BC Persons with AIDS Society and AIDS Vancouver
1107 Seymour Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 5S8
(604) 681-2122
Toll-free: 1-800-994-2437

Positive Women's Network
#614 - 1033 Davie Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 1M7
(604) 692-3000
Toll-free: 1-866-692-3001

Breast Health

Screening Mammography Program of BC
8th Floor, 686 West Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1G1
(604) 660-3639
For the location of your nearest screening centre:1-800-663-9203 (toll-free)

BC Women's Breast Health Program
(604) 875-3705

BC Women's Breast Implant Centre and Information Line (recording of resources)
(604) 875-2013

Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation
#300-1090 West Pender
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 2N7
Lower Mainland: (604) 683-2873
Toll-free: 1-800-561-6111
www.cbcf.org

Canadian Cancer Society
Cancer Information Service
565 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 4J4
(604) 872-4400
Toll-free: 1-888-939-3333
www.cancer.ca

BC and Yukon Breast Cancer Information Project
Lower Mainland: (604) 872-4400
Toll-free: 1-800-663-2524
Publishers of *Abreast in the Nineties* (free quarterly newsletter)
www.cancer.ca/indexe.htm

BC Cancer Agency
Vancouver Cancer Centre and Library
600 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 4E6
Lower Mainland: (604) 877-6000, local 2690
Toll-free: 1-800-663-3333, local 2690
www.bccancer.bc.ca

National Cancer Information Service
Toll-free: 1-888-939-3333

Bone Health

BC Women's Osteofit
Lower Mainland: (604) 875-2555

Osteoporosis Society of Canada
BC Division
(604) 731-4997
Toll-free: 1-800-363-1933
www.osteoporosis.ca

Heart Health

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
222 Queen St. Suite 1402
Ottawa, ON KIP 5V9
(613) 569-4361

Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon
1212 West Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V6H 3V2
(604) 736-4404
Toll-free: 1-800-693-800

Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon
#1 - 947 Fort Street
Victoria, B.C. V8V 3K3
(250) 382-4035

For more local offices see:
http://ww1.heartandstroke.ca/Page.asp?PageID=97

Incontinence

The Canadian Continence Foundation Consumer Help Line
Toll-free: 1-800-265-9575
http://www.continence-fdn.ca/

BC W[illegible] Continence Clinic
(604) 875-3060

Menopause

BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre
4500 Oak Street
Vancouver, B.C., V6H 3N1
(604) 875-3060

Mental Health

Mental Health Information Line
Toll-free: 1-800-661-2121
Lower Mainland: (604) 669-7600

Mental Health Emergency Services
Lower Mainland: (604) 874-7307

Nutrition

Dial -A-Dietitian/Nutrition Hotline
1-800-667-3438

BC Women's Health Centre
Nutrition Counsellor: (604) 875-2267

PMS

BC Women's Reproductive Mental Health Program (604) 875-2025

Violence

Battered Women's Support Services
PO Box 1098, Postal Station A
Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2T1
Counselling: (604) 687-1867

BC Women's Sexual Assault Service (604) 875-2881

Information and Referral for Family and Sexual Violence
Toll-free: 1-800-563-0808

Rape and Assault Crisis Line
Surrey Women's Centre
PO Box 33519
Surrey Place Mall
Surrey, B.C. V3T 5R5
(604) 589-8373

BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses
#507 - 457 Howe Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2B3
(604) 669-6943
1-800-661-1040

WEB SITES

General Health

B.C. Ministry of Health
www.gov.bc.ca/healthservices/
www.gov.bc.ca/healthplanning/

BC HealthGuide
www.bchealthguide.org

Calgary Regional Health Authority
www.crha-health.ab.ca

Health Canada
www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Healthnavigator (a brief guide to sources of heath information from the Consumer Health Information Services of the Toronto Metropolitan Reference Library) www.tpl.toronto.on.ca/TRL/centres/chis/finder.html

Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research
www.mayo.edu.

Medical Self-Care Archives
www.healthy.net/library/journals/self-carearchives/

General Women's Health (Canadian)

Canadian Women's Health Network (Resource Page):
www.cwhn.ca/resource

Centre for Excellence in Women's Health www.bccewh.bc.ca

Chatelaine Connects Health Section www.chatelaine.com

Sympatico Health Portal
www1.sympatico.ca/Contents/Home+Family/health.html

Office of the Special Advisor, Women's and Seniors' Health
www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca/whb

General Women's Health (US)

Healthfinder (US Department of Health and Human Services, section on women's resources)
www.healthfinder.gov

Medscape, Women's Health Section
http://womenshealth.medscape.com/home/topics/wo

National Women's Health Resource Centre (NWHRC)
www.healthywomen.org

HealthWeb
www.healthweb.org

SPECIFIC ISSUES

Cancer

Canadian Cancer Society
www.cancer.ca

B.C. Cancer Agency
www.bccancer.bc.ca

Heart Health

Guide to Medical Information and Support
www.geocities.com/HotSprings/1505/

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

B.C. Heart Health
www.heart-health.org

Healthy Heart Handbook for Women
http://rover.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/hhw

Centre for Cardiovascular Education
www.heartinfo.org

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
www.heartandstroke.ca

Menopause

A Friend Indeed newsletter
www.afriendindeed.ca

Menopause Online
www.menopause-online.com

North America Menopause Society
www.menopause.org

Power Surge
http://www.dearist.com

Soy Protein Council
www.spcouncil.org

U.S. Soyfoods Directory
www.soyfoods.com

Osteoporosis

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
www.sogc.medical.org

Osteoporosis Online
www.osteoporosis.ca

Physical Activity

Canada's Physical Activity Guide
www.paguide.com

FURTHER READING/RESOURCES

Alternative Healing

Alternative Health Care: The Canadian Directory by Bonni Harden and Craig Harden

The Herbal Menopause Book by Amanda McQuade Crawford

The Herbs of Life: Health and Healing Using Western and Chinese Techniques by Leslie Tierra

The Natural Remedy Book for Women by Diane Stein

Bone Health

The Osteoporosis Book: Lifestyle Tips for Healthy Bones by G. Ellert and J. Wade, Trelle Enterprises Inc., 202-2577 Willow Street, Vancouver, B.C., V5Z 3N8

Preventing and Reversing Osteoporosis by Dr. A.R. Gaby

Breast Health

The Complete Breast Book by J. Engel

Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book by Dr. Susan Love

Intelligent Patient Guide to Breast Cancer by I. Olivotto, K. Gelmon, and U. Kuusk, with C. Clegg, 1995, Intelligent Patient Guide Ltd., 517-750 W. Broadway, Vancouver, B.C., V5Z 1H4

Endometriosis

Endometriosis: a Natural Approach by Jo Mears. Berkeley, CA. Ulysses Press

General Health Information

A Complete Guide to Women's Health by B.D. Shephard, MD., and C.A. Shephard

Healthy Women, Healthy Lives: a Guide to Preventing Disease, from the Landmark Nurses' Health Study. 2001. New York. Simon & Shuster

Healthwise Handbook from Healthwise Inc., PO 1989. Boise, ID 83701, (208) 345-1161

I'm Too Young to Get Old, Health Care for Women Over 40 by Dr. Judith Reichman

Living a Healthy Life With Chronic Conditions: Self-Management of Heart Disease, Arthritis, Stroke, Diabetes, Asthma, Bronchitis, Emphysema, and Others by K. Lorig et al.

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Ourselves Growing Older by Paula Brown Doress and Donna Laskin Seigal

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Catching Our Breath by Deborah Holmberg-Schwartz, Women's Health Clinic, 3rd Floor, 419 Graham Avenue, Winnipeg, MN R3C 0M2

Heart Health

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Medical Consumerism

The Savvy Patient: How to Be an Active Participant in Your Medical Care by D.R. Stutz, MD, and B Feder

Menopause

A Friend Indeed: for women in the prime of life (monthly newsletter)
Box 515, Place du Parc Station, Montreal, PQ H2W 2P1

Dr. Susan Love's Hormone Book by Dr. Susan Love

Eat Well for a Healthy Menopause: the low-fat, high-nutrition guide by Elaine Moquette-Magee

The Estrogen Decision by Susan Lark

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Menopause Naturally by Sadja Greenwood

Understanding Menopause by Janine O'Leary Cobb

Women's Health in Midlife Kit: Making Informed Decisions About Hormone Therapy and Making Informed Decisions About Complimentary Therapy, B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre, (604) 875-3050

Mental Self-Care

The Feeling Good Handbook by D. Burns. MD

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Nutrition

Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy: the Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating by Walter C. Willett. New York. Simon & Schuster

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Other Health Issues

Canadian Continence Network Newsletter, West Coast Continence Clinic, 1-800-336-8708

Women and Fatigue by Dr. Holly Atkinson

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PMS Relief: Natural Approaches to Treating Symptoms by Judy E. Marchel. New York. Berkly.

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Wellness

Active Living from Human Kenetics Canada, 1800-465-7301

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